

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 470

EA 025 942

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TITLE Focusing on the Individual Change Process in School Restructuring.
PUB DATE Jun 94
NOTE 15p.; Keynote address at the Texas Education Agency Institute on Reaching All Students: Building School District Capacity (Austin, TX, June 28, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); *Attitude Change; Behavior Change; *Change Strategies; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Grief; *Organizational Change; *Resistance to Change; *School Restructuring

ABSTRACT

Understanding what change is and how schools change determines the success of school reform. This paper addresses the nature of the change process at the individual level. Two assumptions are made about change. First, behavior is based on beliefs and values, and individuals, not groups or organizations, change. Second, change must satisfy the individual person. Therefore, to change behavior, individuals must relinquish old behaviors and substitute new ones. This is accomplished through the grief process (Kubler-Ross, 1969), which is comprised of five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The grief process can be used to understand educational change, and some implications are: (1) clarify expectations and give reasons for those expectations; (2) understand the negative reactions of staff as part of the process; (3) present change as improvement, rather than as criticism of individuals' past behaviors; (4) exercise persistence; and (5) provide individual support throughout the change process. (LMI)

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FOCUSING ON THE INDIVIDUAL CHANGE PROCESS
IN
SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

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ON

REACHING ALL STUDENTS: BUILDING SCHOOL DISTRICT CAPACITY

JUNE 28, 1994

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IN

SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

The current literature about education is replete with new concepts regarding the organization, administration and function of schools. Within the past few years, terms such as "school-based management," "less is more," "teacher as coach," "principal as facilitator," "total quality management," "teacher empowerment," "collaboration," "cooperative learning," and "authentic assessment" have become familiar to the readers of educational journals and books and draw crowds at national and regional conferences.

The proliferation of these concepts comes under the generic terms of school restructuring. The justification for and advantages of school restructuring are discussed by a myriad of sources from the national to local levels. But how are these concepts translated into practical applications at the level of the individual school? What is school restructuring about? It is about change.

What is change? How do schools change? Do schools change? These questions are essential to school reform and their answers will determine the success or failure of restructuring efforts. Therefore, the process of change

must be understood if the efforts at school reform are to have a chance at success. If we proceed with false assumptions about change, then our efforts at change are doomed.

What Is Change?

Change involves two key elements: understanding that behavior is based upon beliefs and values and understanding that individuals not groups or organizations change.

Schools are composed of individual people who together combine to educate students. Each individual has a specific role and acts out that role in a unique manner. If change is to occur in schools, the individuals in the schools must change. New job descriptions can be written which establish teachers as coaches and administrators as facilitators. Superficially, change has occurred but only in the job descriptions not in the people who act in the jobs described. What is needed is for people in schools to change their behaviors. Before restructuring can be successful, it becomes important to identify the behaviors which must change (Tye, 1992), and then work with individuals so that individual behaviors change.

Under imposed authority, behavior can change. People will assume new behaviors if threatened or coerced. However, this new behavior either will not last or it will

be acted out under duress, but this new behavior will not be done because people believe in it. As has happened and continues to happen too often in education, once the agent of change is no longer present or once the pressure for the new behavior is lifted, then the old behavior will replace the new behavior.

People do not act just to act. They act because of their beliefs and values. If change is to be permanent, then the focus of change must be upon their beliefs and values which are the underlying reasons for actions. As Sams and Schenkat (1990) discovered in their attempts to restructure the Winona, Wisconsin school district, restructuring is the purposeful and systematic alteration of a range of beliefs, conditions, practices and traditions to attain a specific end.

A second assumption about change is that change must satisfy the individual person and not a group of persons. Thus, the principal who focuses on changing the English department will not be successful unless the focus shifts to changing the behaviors of the individual members of the English department.

Behavior is personal, therefore, change is personal. Change is based upon a personal not a group decision. Only individuals can choose to change their own personal behavior. Group pressure can coerce individual change, but

then it's the same as authoritarian coercion and is not permanent. Any fluctuation in group pressure to a lessening of pressure will cause individuals to revert back to prior behavior. This reversion to past behavior is easily viewed in schools because of the isolation of teachers in the performance of their work.

Individuals must change their own values and beliefs in order for their actions to change. As Morris (1986) clarifies, individuals cannot reconcile new behaviors in terms of some impersonal utilitarian calculation of the common good. Reconciliation between old beliefs and values and new beliefs and values can only occur within the individual.

Then how do individuals change their beliefs and values which are the bases for their actions? What is the change process?

The Change Process

In order to change behavior, individuals must give up prior behaviors and substitute new behaviors. To make this substitution, the beliefs and values which were the reasons for the old behavior must be let go of and the beliefs and values which are the bases for the new behavior must be embraced.

The essential component of change is giving up the old for the new. This giving up process is the most difficult element of change because of the individual's need for security which is based upon familiarity. We are most comfortable with that which is familiar to us. The unfamiliar brings anxiety because we are unable to predict what results our behavior will produce. Comfort and security are inherent components of human behavior because we become attached to behaviors, things, people and places. When these attachments are broken, we flounder and our world becomes uncomfortable and insecure. Fullan and Miles (1992) relate that change threatens existing interests and routines, heightens uncertainty and increases complexity. Thus, change is a process of loss of old behaviors and reattachment to new behaviors based upon a change of beliefs and values.

How is the reconciliation between loss of old and attachment to new made? How do individuals give up the old behavior and embrace the new?

The Grief Process

The answers to these questions can be found in the 1969 work of Kubler-Ross which describes the changes which individuals go through during the grief process when they are confronted with loss. While the grief process has been

applied to job counseling (Drevets, 1988) and to the experiences of parents of disabled children (Witcher, 1989), it has not heretofore been formally applied to the change process in education. Yet its application provides a practical understanding for educational change agents of how individuals' behaviors can change and the steps which change agents must allow individuals to go through in order to facilitate change. The simple five steps of the grief process clarify the manner by which individual change occurs.

The first step in the grief process is denial. When a new behavior is introduced, resistance is rampant because individuals' security and comfort are threatened. Reality is avoided by denying that change is to occur. This is a natural phenomenon when confronted with change in that denial provides individuals with a psychological cushion against which the harshness of reality can be softened.

As individuals react with the "fight or flight" behaviors when confronted with threatening behaviors, individuals either fly away by denial or become combative through anger. Anger is the second step of the grief process. As the reality of change becomes persistent, individuals flail externally against the source(s) of change in hope that such expression of anger will cause the new reality to cease its progression. This anger is not

personal in that the change agent is not the focus of the anger, but the change in behavior caused by the agent is the focus of the anger.

During the third step of the grief process, individuals try one last time to hold on to even part of the past behaviors through bargaining. They attempt to recapture what is on the verge of being lost. Through rationalization, individuals attempt to find ways to stop the new behaviors from being implemented or attempt to find ways to incorporate the old into the new behaviors so as to make the new behaviors more comfortable, secure and familiar.

The fourth step in the grief process is depression. As the change process continues, the externalized anger turns to internalized anger in the form of depression. Individuals begin to realize that the old behavior will be lost and that a new behavior will replace it. During this step of the grief process, individuals say good-bye to past behaviors because they come to realize that they have no other choice.

Finally, when individuals come to the realization that the old behaviors are no longer acceptable or possible, they accept the new behaviors as part of their reality. They cease fighting against the change and move ahead with the new behaviors.

Implications for Practice

When school administrators understand the grief process and its relation to restructuring, they become aware that change has both rational and emotional implications. The focus on one to the exclusion of the other will hinder or halt the change process.

School administrators need to be aware that the lack of enthusiasm and sometimes overt hostility by teachers during times of change are natural. These negative behaviors should not only be tolerated but encouraged. Passive compliance is not the path of change but of subversion of change. Negative statements indicate that teachers are reacting to the change process: "This will never work." "We tried this years ago." "Students will be at a disadvantage on tests." "Who does this principal think she is." "I've taught this subject my own way for twenty years and I know what my students should learn." If administrators become overwhelmed by negative reaction, the change process will become bogged down and not proceed to implementation. Administrators need to allow their teachers to deny the change and to be angry that the change is to occur. Anger is against the change itself and not against the change agent, although statements might be made by teachers which impugn the personal and professional

qualifications of the change agent in order to divert focus from the real issue.

The change itself must be clarified in terms of the underlying knowledge base and the values which support this knowledge. Changing behavior implies changing values and beliefs and those who are asked to change should be aware of the beliefs and values of the new behaviors. Explanation of the new behavior is required but insufficient. Faculty will need to know not only what is expected of them but why it is expected. Morris (1986) proposes that when only explanation is provided during a time of change and change agents view opposition as ignorance or prejudice, change agents express a profound contempt for the meaning of lives other than their own. Therefore, the focus should be equally on the meaning underlying the change in order for those who are to change to focus on the level of values and beliefs.

Change should also be introduced as improvement not as negation of past behaviors. Teachers identify themselves with their behaviors as do all of us. To impugn past behavior is to impugn the individuals who acted out this behavior. This moves the arena from the professional to the personal and the change is now viewed as a personal attack on individuals. The concept of improvement can easily be understood by everyone because all can understand the need

to do better. Therefore, change is best viewed as improvement of current practices.

School administrators need to be persistent about the change process. Teachers should realize from the onset that the change will occur and that there is no room for manipulation. A timeline indicating the stages of the change will best settle this issue. Those who are asked to change will attempt to bargain and find a way to subvert or dilute the change. Subversion may come in the form of seeking testimonials from students, parents, school board members or other professionals. Thus, school administrators need to make these other constituencies aware of the change from the onset so as not to have incorrect or inflammatory information provided by the opposition. Dilution of the change can come in the form of seeking to incorporate past behaviors with new behaviors. The persistence of school administrators while patiently listening to these manipulative strategies is crucial. So many classrooms have piles of textbooks and materials which were to be used, but never were. It may be necessary to remove old textbooks and materials in order for the new texts and materials to be implemented.

If change is personal, then the support needed to implement change must be personal. Individuals should receive personal support not group support. Pink (1986)

views long-term support of change as the missing link in successful implementation of school reform. Change must be self-satisfying and those who begin the change process need to feel good about what they are about. Therefore, rewards and recognition have a place in change, but only after the new behaviors have been implemented. If individual teachers do not receive individual support and recognition for their change efforts, once the classroom door closes, they will easily revert to past behaviors.

The grief process also points out the importance of time. Change takes time. Without sufficient time to go through the steps of the grief process, individuals will change only superficially and the past behaviors will again resurface. Morris (1986) indicates that during times of change, a moratorium on other business should be established so that the disruption of change can be resolved and a continuity of attachments can be discovered. Too many changes in too short of a time can exhaust individuals' emotional resilience. Change is emotionally draining and only time can assist individuals to bounce back after a challenge to past beliefs and values.

Conclusions

As Fullan and Miles (1992) conclude, being knowledgeable about the change process may be both the best

defense and best offense we have in achieving substantial educational reform. People do not change because we wish them to; people change when they are allowed to go through the process of change.

Education has been plagued by superficial changes which has allowed education to remain substantially the same. It is time to refocus our efforts on the people who are members of the educational community and look at them as individuals. This will entail the need for school administrators to improve their people skills and focus on people and not things. In order to get "things" done, people will have to do them. School reform will only occur if individuals within our schools choose to change. The grief process helps to clarify the means by which individuals do change and can be of assistance to those change agents who seek to restructure our schools.

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